

The University of Chicago

THE EFFECTS OF PRINT ON
PUBLIC OPINION

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE LIBRARY
SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1941

By

BERNARD BERELSON

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Reprinted from
Waples (ed.), PRINT, FILM, AND RADIO IN A DEMOCRACY
(The University of Chicago Press)

The University of Chicago

THE EFFECTS OF PRINT ON
PUBLIC OPINION

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE LIBRARY
SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1941

By
BERNARD BERELSON

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Reprinted from
Waples (ed.), PRINT, FILM, AND RADIO IN A DEMOCRACY
(The University of Chicago Press)



THE EFFECTS OF PRINT UPON PUBLIC OPINION

BERNARD BERELSON

UNTIL the nineteenth century communication by print was largely élite communication. A minority of writers communicated to a minority of readers, and print was discussed in literary terms and judged by literary values. With popular education and the penny press, however, communication by print has become mass communication. The minority still writes, but for all to read; and print is discussed in social terms and used for social purposes. More recently still, print has shared the field of mass communication with radio and motion pictures. But despite their competition, and in some cases because of it, print exerts an effective influence upon public opinion. What that influence is and how it typically operates are the considerations of this paper.

What is the effect of print upon public opinion? The question may be reformulated in any number of ways. How effective is print relative to the other factors which influence public opinion? How effective is it relative to other mediums of communication—both public (the radio) and private (conversation)? Under what social conditions is it more and less effective? What kinds of people respond to print in what ways, and why? What characteristics of print itself are more and less effective? Such questions could be multiplied at length; they serve simply to suggest the nature of the problem.

Any discussion of the effects of print upon public opinion should say something about three key questions: (1) What print is there? (2) Who reads it? (3) What are the effects? The first question sets the theoretical limits of effects, the

second sets the operational limits, and the third describes the limits as observed. When we know what print is available and who reads it, we recognize the framework within which the effects of print may normally be expected to operate. Although the universe of print is theoretically available, that is only a formal fact with little relevance to the actual case in which people restrict their reading in various ways. The effects print might have are one thing, and the effects it does have are another.

In order to understand the effect of print upon public opinion, we must understand the effect of public opinion upon print. The influence is clearly reciprocal. The Middle West is relatively isolationist, and so are its newspapers. Does A follow B, or does B follow A? Or are both dependent upon C and D, which are tradition and geographical position? We shall see that print can and does convert people to new or changed opinions. It also reinforces pre-existent opinions by deliberately telling people what they most want to be told.

One popular assumption is that the most beneficial effects of print upon public opinion are likely to come from the reading of serious books on social problems. Whether the assumption is true or not—and there is some reason to doubt it—society probably cannot afford to await the clarification of public opinion by such reading. The evidence suggests that perhaps 2 or 3 per cent of the population—students and professional workers—read such books. In the formation of mass opinion, the treatment of social problems in the daily newspaper and the popular magazines are the major sources of stimuli.

In a discussion of the effects of print upon public opinion, two key questions are involved. The first is: To what extent does print influence public opinion, relative to the other factors which influence it? Nothing is clearer than that print (or communication) alone does not determine public opinion. Other factors—for example, group predispositions and relevant changes in the environment—must be considered in

order to estimate the effects of print either alone or in combination. The second question is: What kinds of influence does print exert upon public opinion? Now "kinds of influence" can be classified in various ways, depending upon the purpose at hand. The classification used here distinguishes reinforcing influences and converting influences. Print reinforces when it simply supports what people already believe and hence strengthens their pre-existent attitudes. Print converts when it serves to originate opinions or to modify them (partially) or to change them (completely).

The following report is based upon a study relating the opinions of people to their exposures in mass communications. The report will deal quite closely with the processes whereby print and radio influence public opinion. Such processes must be subjected to this detailed analysis in order to serve as the basis for further generalizations.

A brief description of the study will set the stage. The purpose was to identify the factors determining recognition of and agreement with political arguments on a controversial public issue. Why do people see such arguments and why do they accept them? The study involves issues, people, and communications.

The issues are those raised in the 1940 presidential campaign. The central issue of the campaign was whether Willkie or Roosevelt should be elected president of the United States. The campaign was fought out, however, in terms of several subissues of domestic and foreign policy. Each side made every effort to draw the attention of the electorate to its own statement of the case by pointing out its own virtues and its opponents' weaknesses. Such statements are here called arguments, and our analysis is carried out in terms of them.

The people are two representative groups living in a small midwest county notable for its conformity in opinion to the country as a whole. Both groups were selected as typical of their county in almost all respects. Their responses were secured by professional interviewers. The interviews of the

two groups were similar in nature and were administered at two different times, both within the final month of the campaign.

The communications are the newspapers and magazines read by the respondents and the radio broadcasts they heard. Among other questions, the respondents were asked what newspaper and magazine they read regularly for campaign news and what radio speeches and newscasts they listened to. A sample of the most frequently used communications was analyzed for three time-periods in order to secure data on the content to which the respondents were exposed. From the analysis we were able to reconstruct the arguments used in the interviews.

In short, our study deals with two sets of data—one deriving from a set of interviews and the other from a content analysis of selected public communications. The common denominator by which we relate the two sets of data is a list of arguments. From the interviews we learn how frequently each argument was recognized by specified groups of respondents, where it was recognized (that is, in what mediums of communication), and how frequently it was accepted. From the analysis of the content we learn how frequently each argument appeared in the newspapers and magazines and radio broadcasts which were most popular with the respondents. For our set of arguments, then, we have data on three central factors in the influence of mass communication upon public opinion—content emphasis, recognition, and agreement. By content emphasis we mean the relative frequency with which the arguments appeared in the public communications. By recognition we mean the relative frequency with which the respondents, as a group, said they had “come across” the arguments. By agreement we mean the relative frequency with which the respondents, as a group, accepted the arguments. The frequency of the arguments in the content is represented in Table 1, and the distribution of interview responses relative to them is shown in Tables 2 and 3.

The problem is to discover the significant relationships among these three factors. Does recognition follow content

TABLE 1*
FREQUENCY OF ARGUMENTS IN THE CONTENT

Argument	Argument	Counter-argument	Total
1. Roosevelt was born a rich man and has never understood the value of a dollar, as shown by his spending policies	13	1	14
2. <i>Roosevelt has great personal attractiveness, capacity for hard work, and keen intelligence†</i>	30	25	55
3. Willkie is a self-made small-town man, who made his way by his genius for industrial organization†	33	13	46
4. Willkie's career of work and success shows him to be the sort of person whom most Americans would like to see president of the United States	59	36	95
5. <i>Willkie is a corporation lawyer whose real sympathies are all with big business†</i>	23	17	40
6. <i>Roosevelt's New Deal has saved the farmer and the working man from ruin</i>	17	48	65
7. The New Deal has interfered too much with private business†	35	3	38
8. Roosevelt is rushing the country into war against most of the rest of the world†	47	64	111
9. Willkie will do a better job of building the country's defenses because he has the confidence of big business	35	7	42
10. <i>Willkie's foreign policies are the same as Roosevelt's</i>	6	5	11
11. Willkie will carry on most of Roosevelt's program with better results	19	7	26
12. We should not break the democratic tradition by electing any president to a third term†	150	13	163
13. <i>With Roosevelt as president, the United States is less likely to yield to Hitler</i>	27	9	36
14. Willkie will increase production by gaining the confidence of business†	62	7	69
Total	556	255	811

* Pro-Democratic arguments are italicized. Arguments marked by a dagger (†) were used in the second interview.

emphasis—that is, do people see the arguments with the same relative frequency with which they appear in public

TABLE 2*

INTERVIEW RESPONSES ON RECOGNITION AND AGREEMENT

ARGUMENT	HAVE YOU COME ACROSS THIS ARGUMENT?			IF SO, WHERE DID YOU COME ACROSS IT?						DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS ARGUMENT?		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Con- versa- tion	News- paper	Radio	Maga- zine	Other	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know
1. Roosevelt was born a rich man and has never under- stood the value of a dollar, as shown by his spending policies.....	92	82	8	50	14	20	10	2	5	75	62	45
2. Roosevelt has great personal attractiveness, capacity for hard work, and keen intelligence.....	90	80	12	38	18	14	15	3	13	130	26	26
3. Willkie is a self-made small-town man, who made his way by his genius for industrial organization.....	113	57	12	36	45	17	20	3	6	110	13	59
4. Willkie's career of work and success shows him to be the sort of person whom most Americans would like to see president.....	87	75	20	47	18	13	5	3	5	76	50	56
5. Willkie is a corporation lawyer whose real sympathies are all with big business.....	88	73	21	45	16	14	8	0	11	56	68	58
6. Roosevelt's New Deal has saved the farmer and the working man from ruin.....	123	46	13	86	19	17	4	0	6	75	70	37
7. The New Deal has interfered too much with private business.....	101	66	15	61	29	18	5	0	7	77	45	60
8. Roosevelt is rushing the country into war against most of the rest of the world.....	112	59	11	57	34	22	4	0	6	39	103	40
9. Willkie will do a better job of building the country's defenses because he has the confidence of big business	58	98	26	26	16	15	4	0	3	53	64	65
10. Willkie's foreign policies are the same as Roosevelt's..	78	82	22	31	27	16	7	1	3	60	33	89
11. Willkie will carry on most of Roosevelt's program with better results.....	71	90	21	24	14	23	4	1	7	41	70	71
12. We should not break the democratic tradition by electing any president to a third term.....	162	15	5	105	65	38	12	3	9	87	75	20
13. With Roosevelt as president, the United States is less likely to yield to Hitler.....	43	117	22	24	8	9	2	1	5	47	78	57

TABLE 3*
INTERVIEW RESPONSES ON RECOGNITION AND AGREEMENT

ARGUMENT	HAVE YOU COME ACROSS THIS ARGUMENT?			IF SO, WHERE DID YOU COME ACROSS IT?						DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS ARGUMENT?		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Con- versa- tion	News- paper	Radio	Maga- zine	Other	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know
1. Roosevelt has great personal attractiveness, capacity for hard work, and keen intelligence.....	203	249	37	67	56	72	20	2	15	322	76	86
2. Willkie is a self-made small-town man, who made his way by his genius for industrial organization.....	311	153	24	75	132	103	43	10	7	273	49	164
3. Willkie is a corporation lawyer whose real sympathies are all with big business.....	284	171	34	93	95	99	23	5	17	172	126	186
4. The New Deal has interfered too much with private business.....	297	158	32	118	128	87	27	4	13	199	139	144
5. Roosevelt is rushing the country into war against most of the rest of the world.....	316	148	23	112	124	123	16	6	10	97	263	122
6. We should not break the democratic tradition by electing any president to a third term.....	412	56	18	213	226	183	77	5	15	237	183	63
7. With Roosevelt as president, the United States is less likely to yield to Hitler.....	147	292	46	64	58	53	12	0	9	124	189	167
8. Willkie will increase production by gaining the confidence of business.....	261	180	42	77	101	128	23	4	10	195	113	172

* Total sample of second interview.

communications? Does emphasis in the content bring agreement with arguments? Does the influence of the content work differently for different kinds of arguments and for voters of differing predispositions? Does recognition of arguments bring agreement with them, or does agreement bring recognition? Such are the questions we shall ask. Three major sets of findings resulted from the study, and we shall report each in turn. The first refers to the factors affecting recognition; the second, the factors affecting agreement; and the third, the reciprocal influences between recognition and agreement.

Factors affecting recognition.—Why do people see (and hear) certain arguments on a public issue? Do they encounter the arguments with the same relative frequency with which the arguments appear in public communications? Do they tend to recognize favorable arguments and not to recognize unfavorable arguments? What other factors affect recognition? The data identified three factors which influence recognition—content emphasis, the predispositions of the respondents, and the nature of the argument.

There is a positive covariation between recognition and content emphasis. The more the argument appears in the mediums of communication the greater the recognition by our respondents. By and large, people saw the arguments in the order of their emphasis in the public mediums of communications.

The content analysis was made only for the three public mediums of communication, but we have data on recognition for the private medium of conversation as well. By relating these two sets of data, we can discover whether people talk about arguments in the same relative frequency with which the arguments are emphasized in the formal mediums of communications. The evidence indicates that they do. Here, then, print exercises a secondary effect by providing the topics discussed in private conversation.

This describes the relationship of content and recognition

without regard to whatever other factors influence that relationship. That such other factors operate is clear. We shall now isolate two other factors which tend to increase or decrease the recognition of arguments. The first such factor is predispositions. By this we mean the whole complex of social characteristics—income, occupation, education, age and sex, religion, group membership and group loyalties, and so forth—which inclines people confronted with public issues to respond in certain ways and not in others. In the present discussion we shall take the probable vote of the respondent as the indication of his predispositions; it constitutes an index to his basic attitude toward the campaign. In short, predispositions represent a general tendency to accept certain specific arguments. How do they influence recognition?

Predispositions tend to increase the recognition of favorable arguments and to decrease the recognition of unfavorable arguments. Republicans see and hear more Republican arguments than Democratic, and Democrats see and hear more Democratic arguments than Republican. This tendency for each side to recognize its own arguments and disregard its opponents' arguments introduces a competing influence to content emphasis in determining what people see and hear. Which is the stronger determinant upon recognition—emphasis in the content or predispositions? Do people see the arguments there are, or do they see the arguments they want to see?

The fact that Republicans and Democrats tend to see the same arguments suggests the dominance of content emphasis. The correlation of recognition by the two groups is significantly positive. And when we chart the distribution of arguments around the line of correlation, we see at a glance the effect of predispositions. The Republican arguments fall on the Republican side of the correlation line, and the Democratic arguments fall on the Democratic side. But why is there a correlation at all? Why do Republicans recognize some Democratic arguments more frequently than they

recognize some Republican—and similarly for Democrats? The answer is emphasis in the content. Content emphasis maximizes the correlation between the two groups, and predispositions minimize it—and there is a positive correlation. Content emphasis thus appears to determine recognition more strongly than do predispositions.

So much for the role of predispositions. Another factor which affects the recognition process is the nature of the argument. Some arguments, other things equal, are more likely to be seen and (heard) than others. In the discussion of predispositions just concluded, this was demonstrated for favorable and unfavorable arguments. Three other characteristics of arguments which seem to increase recognition may be mentioned: (1) association with a prominent current event—for example, the arguments dealing with the war; (2) the “cruciality” of the argument—for example, the argument opposing the third term; and (3) the “intensity” of the argument—that is, its tendency to be completely accepted or completely rejected, depending upon the voter’s partisanship. In each case such arguments were seen and heard more frequently than they would have been on the basis of the content alone. The general conclusion is that the statement of the argument has an effect upon its recognition, other things equal. Some kinds of arguments receive wider attention than other kinds.

Factors affecting agreement.—Our question was: Why do people see and hear certain arguments and not others? Now our question is: Why do people accept certain arguments and not others? In dealing with recognition we answered the “why” in terms of three factors—content frequency, predispositions, and the nature of the argument. Now, in considering agreement, we shall deal with the same three factors, though in a different order. Our general finding is that the factors that determine recognition also determine agreement but that their relative emphasis is quite different in the two processes.

The first factor to be discussed is predispositions, because it seems clear that the respondent's predispositions constitute the dominant factor in determining agreement. The term, we will recall, refers to that combination of social characteristics which "slants" people in certain directions and not in others. In the discussion to follow we again take predispositions to refer to the probable vote of the respondent. As we have suggested, it may be taken as a shorthand symbolization of the total effect of class position, personal conditions, and so forth, where the "and so forth" includes the previous results of just such public discussions on controversial issues as the one we studied. The influences exerted upon attitudes during a previous public discussion may endure to form or to condition predispositions toward a later one. In our context the previous public discussions may have dealt with labor legislation, or governmental regulation of business, or America's foreign policy, or any other prominent public issue of the late 1930's; the later public discussion deals with the issues of the 1940 presidential campaign. It is clear, of course, that such predispositions exist on virtually every public issue. It is difficult to imagine a serious issue so novel that no previously formed preferences would be involved in its acceptance or rejection.

So much for the implications of the term. Do respondents follow their predispositions in agreeing and disagreeing with arguments? The answer is clearly "yes." Republicans agree with Republican arguments and Democrats with Democratic arguments; and each group disagrees with the arguments of the other. Three-fifths (or 60 per cent) of the voters followed their predispositions, one-sixth (or 17 per cent) opposed them, and something over a fifth (or about 23 per cent) were undecided.

But this evidence in itself is somewhat misleading, since it includes the responses of those voters who had recognized the arguments. Perhaps recognition was responsible for agreement and not predispositions at all. However, we can test

this objection by limiting agreement to those respondents who had not already seen or heard the arguments. We will recall that the respondents were asked whether they had come across the argument. Of all the responses, between 35 and 40 per cent were "no." Voters who responded thus to any argument were presumably encountering it for the first time; hence their response to the question on agreement would be in no way affected by prior recognition and hence by the content of public communications. When people with active predispositions toward a controversial social issue are confronted for the first time with arguments relating to the issue, their immediate responses testify to the dominant role of predispositions. In one-half the cases their opinions support their previous position, in one-sixth they oppose it, and in one-third they are undecided.

In short, at any given time predispositions constitute the primary determinant of agreement. Whatever other factors operate in determining agreement must begin here to exercise their influence. We shall see that content emphasis has an influence upon agreement; but its influence is subject to the priority of predispositions. Certain characteristics of the argument also tend to increase or decrease its acceptance, but they, too, must first overcome the "will to approve" found in the predispositions of party vote. We previously found that content emphasis was a stronger determinant of recognition than predispositions. Here we find that predispositions are a stronger determinant of agreement than content emphasis. Of all the opinions held by partisans when first confronted with controversial arguments, half derive directly from their previous position toward that issue.

What is the role of content emphasis? How is the respondent's acceptance of arguments affected by the communications to which he was exposed? This is the central problem. It is here that the effect of print upon public opinion actually operates. We have identified three ways in which content is

involved in the formation of political opinion: (1) content emphasis decreases indecision; (2) it tends to regulate relative agreement among arguments "within" the influence of predispositions; and (3) it increases agreement. Let us discuss each of these in turn.

The amount of indecision falls sharply among those recognizing the arguments, regardless of party. If the argument has not been recognized, one-third of the responses are undecided. If the argument has been recognized, only one-eighth of the responses remain undecided. The greater the content emphasis of an argument the fewer the undecided opinions toward it. In short, content emphasis is a dominant factor in bringing decision—whatever the nature of the decision. As we have seen, the greater the content emphasis of the argument the greater its recognition and the more it is discussed in private conversations. The greater the argument's circulation in the community the greater the incentive for people to make up their minds about it, one way or the other. And when they do make up their minds, their decision ordinarily follows predispositions. Thus, content emphasis "forces" a decision, but predispositions determine the nature of the decision.

Our second influence of content upon agreement supplements the influence of predispositions. It seems clear that predispositions are basic in determining the initial response to favorable and unfavorable arguments; Republicans take the Republican position, and Democrats take the Democratic position. Starting from this point, however, content emphasis is instrumental in determining relative agreement with arguments. Republicans agree with their own arguments and disagree with their opponents', but the relative frequencies of such responses correspond to the relative frequencies with which the Republican statement of the arguments appears in the content. Here, then, content emphasis has a supplementary influence upon agreement. Predisposi-

tions largely determine with what side groups of people will agree and disagree, and then content emphasis largely determines with what relative frequencies.

Finally, content emphasis increases agreement with arguments. This must not be understood as contradictory to what has been said before. Content emphasis increases agreement, but it is not so strong a determinant of agreement as predispositions. We find a higher percentage of agreement in every case for those recognizing than for those not recognizing.

TABLE 4
DIFFERENTIAL IN AGREEMENT BETWEEN RESPONDENTS
RECOGNIZING AND NOT RECOGNIZING ARGUMENTS

Respondents	Percentage Agreeing of Those Recognizing in the Three Public Mediums	Percentage Agreeing of Those Not Recognizing in Any Medium
<i>First interview:</i>		
Total sample.....	58.5	20.9
Republicans.....	71.9	25.2
Democrats.....	43.8	23.0
<i>Second interview:</i>		
Total sample.....	54.2	26.7
Republicans.....	70.2	28.6
Democrats.....	37.6	30.8

ing, whether we deal with Republicans, with Democrats, or with the sample as a whole (Table 4).

This analysis of the factors determining agreement would be incomplete without attention to certain characteristics of arguments which affect their chances of acceptance and rejection. It is clear that different arguments have different degrees of acceptability: that is, they have differing capacities to "get themselves accepted." Indeed, in the discussion of predispositions we were dealing implicitly with one such characteristic of paramount importance—the argument's support of one side or the other. We have seen that such char-

acteristics are influential in determining recognition, and they are similarly influential in agreement.

With one such characteristic—the “old”-ness or “new”-ness of the argument—we can test our hypothesis regarding the influence of content. Old arguments were introduced earlier, new arguments were introduced later. If content increases agreement, then new arguments should be less widely accepted, since they are more recently introduced into the community. This characteristic appears to be influential for the entire sample; old arguments are accepted more than new arguments. The “age” of the argument has some effect but much less than its partisanship.

Another characteristic is “cruciality.” Party predispositions become especially influential for acceptance or rejection when confronted with the crucial arguments of the controversy. Without much question, the crucial argument of the 1940 campaign centered in the third term. Republicans accepted the no-third-term position almost unanimously as their best single argument; and Democrats opposed it just as strongly, since acceptance would not only involve party disloyalty but would virtually undermine their whole position. The differential in agreement between the two party groups is higher for this argument than for any other; the percentage of Republicans accepting it is over 70 per cent larger than the percentage of Democrats accepting it. Presumably such crucial arguments have a strong tendency toward acceptance by the favored side and rejection by the opposed side.

One other characteristic which appears to bring agreement has been identified—the statement of the argument in terms of “personalities” rather than “issues.” The most frequently accepted arguments in both interviews were personality arguments: the Democratic argument—“Roosevelt has great personal attractiveness, capacity for hard work, and keen intelligence”; and the Republican argument—“Willkie is a self-made small-town man with a genius for industrial organi-

zation." Not only did a total of over 60 per cent of the respondents agree with each of these arguments, but they were the only arguments accepted by the opposition more frequently than they were rejected. That is, these were the only arguments to overcome party predispositions; even Republicans conceded that Roosevelt was intelligent and industrious, and even Democrats admitted that Willkie was a success.

Reciprocal influences of recognition and agreement.—Such are the factors which determine recognition and agreement. Our discussion to this point now serves as the introduction to a closer analysis of the opinion process and the effects of print upon it. We may approach the central problem in another way—by a sort of shorthand representation in which recognition and agreement are discussed not in terms of their component factors but rather in terms of themselves. Although their interactions have heretofore been suggested, we have not systematically discussed the influences of the one upon the other. Such influences we believe to be crucial to our whole problem, since they determine print's effectiveness. Print may reinforce people, or it may convert them. This is the issue! If people use print to clarify and inform themselves, then its usefulness knows few bounds. If, however, people use print simply to confirm and intensify the opinions they already hold, then the social value of print is small indeed. The extent to which print is an active determinant of public opinion rests with this problem.

The positive relationship between recognition and agreement is quite clear. The people who recognized more arguments also agreed with more. The people who recognized fewer also agreed with fewer. This association poses the problem. Does recognition bring agreement, or does agreement bring recognition, or both; under what conditions and with what relative strength? Do people believe what they see, or do they see what they believe? In which direction

does the influence flow? The brief answer is, in both directions.

Recognition increases agreement. The number agreeing among respondents recognizing the arguments is consistently higher than that among respondents who did not recognize them. To such evidence, however, an objection may be raised. Perhaps a process of self-selection among the respondents operates to cause the differences. Perhaps some people tend to recognize and to agree, and others tend not to recognize and to disagree. If this is true, then the increases in agreement are not attributable to the influence of recognition but are rather due to differences in respondents, which incline them toward either group.

To meet this objection we constructed a series of matched pairs, thereby holding constant the relevant characteristics of the respondents as far as possible. The matching characteristics were three: (1) probable vote in 1940, to equalize current party preference; (2) actual vote in 1936, to equalize the "strength" of party preference; and (3) a composite of the respondent's residence, economic status, religion, and age, to equalize social characteristics. For each argument separately, we matched two numerically equal groups of respondents—one which had recognized the argument and one which had not recognized the argument. In other words, for every respondent in one group we had a respondent of the same three characteristics in the other.

The over-all finding is that recognition increases agreement (Table 5). Those recognizing the arguments agree with them nearly 20 per cent more than those not recognizing them; disagreement is strikingly constant (although, as we shall see, this apparent constancy conceals the changes actually occurring); and indecision is accordingly lowered. From this total picture the conclusion would be that recognition causes people who are undecided to make up their minds in favor of the argument.

Does recognition increase agreement regardless of party

predispositions? The evidence shows clearly that it does. Both Republicans and Democrats conform to the total pattern—agreement increases, disagreement remains constant, and indecision decreases. Does recognition increase agreement regardless of the argument's partisanship? Again the evidence confirms our general conclusion. Whether the argument favors the Republicans or the Democrats, agreement with it increases among those who recognize it.

But when we distinguish the argument's partisanship and probable vote at the same time, we gain new insight into the

TABLE 5
EFFECT OF RECOGNITION UPON AGREEMENT

RESPONSE AS TO AGREEMENT	RESPONDENTS RECOGNIZING THE ARGUMENTS		RESPONDENTS NOT RECOGNIZING THE ARGUMENTS	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Agree.....	288	48.1	176	29.4
Disagree.....	214	35.7	217	36.2
Don't know	97	16.2	206	34.4
Total.....	599	100.0	599	100.0

* Matched pairs.

relationship between recognition and agreement (Table 6). In the first place, recognition increases agreement more for favorable arguments than for unfavorable arguments; that is, it reinforces more than it converts. But this breakdown tells us more than that. Agreement increases and indecision decreases, just as before; but the apparent constancy of disagreement we find actually to be a balance between increases and decreases. Recognition decreases disagreement with the respondent's own arguments but increases disagreement with the arguments of his opponents. In other words, when the arguments are favorable, recognition lowers both disagreement and indecision and adds the total difference to agreement: when the arguments are unfavorable, recognition low-

ers indecision but raises disagreement and adds the net difference to agreement. Presumably, the voters with "weaker" loyalties to their party tend to agree with their opponent's position when they see or hear it stated. However, when voters with "stronger" loyalties come across an argument of the opposition, they resist it vigorously and end by rejecting it altogether. The net increase in agreement suggests the predominance of the former group.

TABLE 6*

EFFECT OF RECOGNITION UPON AGREEMENT, WITH ARGUMENTS
CLASSIFIED AS PRO- OR ANTI-PREDISPOSITIONS
OF RESPONDENTS

RESPONSE	PRO-PREDISPOSITIONS				ANTI-PREDISPOSITIONS			
	Respondents Recognizing		Respondents Not Recognizing		Respondents Recognizing		Respondents Not Recognizing	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Agree	188	74.6	125	49.6	100	28.8	51	14.7
Disagree	27	10.7	40	15.9	187	53.9	177	51.0
Don't know	37	14.7	87	34.5	60	17.3	119	34.3
Total	252	100.0	252	100.0	347	100.0	347	100.0

* Matched pairs.

This constitutes a central point. Although recognition of the opposition's arguments increases disagreement with them, it increases agreement still more. In every case the net change favors agreement. Recognition increases agreement—even agreement with the opposition. Also, agreement increases recognition. This generalization was previously suggested in the discussion of the factors influencing recognition; we saw there that Republicans tended to come across Republican arguments. Since probable vote represents latent agreement, we should expect to find this same influence at work with actual agreement.

The same procedure of matched pairs was used here, with

the same characteristics as the basis. The matching was done for groups agreeing and disagreeing with the particular argument, and differences in recognition between them were then determined. Our over-all finding is that agreement increases recognition by about 20 per cent and decreases nonrecognition by the same percentage (Table 7). In other words, with two groups of people of like characteristics, those agreeing with arguments manage to see and hear them more frequently than those disagreeing with them. People find the argu-

TABLE 7*
EFFECT OF AGREEMENT UPON RECOGNITION

RESPONSE AS TO RECOGNITION	RESPONDENTS AGREEING		RESPONDENTS DISAGREEING	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Recognized	215	72.1	157	52.7
Did not recognize	77	25.8	133	44.6
Don't know	6	2.1	8	2.7
Total	298	100.0	298	100.0

* Matched pairs.

ments they approve and avoid the arguments they disapprove.

The evidence seems clear, then, that recognition brings agreement and that agreement brings recognition. But which is stronger, and what conditions determine their operation? Complete answers are impossible here, but we may gain some insights by following our evidence as far as it will go.

We computed indices of total change for each argument, using the matched pairs as a basis. This test of relative strength indicates that the influence of agreement upon recognition is about half again as strong as the reverse influence of recognition upon agreement. That is, our respondents were more likely to come across arguments which they already accepted than they were to accept arguments when they came

across them. The reinforcing influence (agreement to recognition) was, on the whole, about 3 to 2 stronger than the converting influence (recognition to agreement).

Similar indices can, of course, be prepared for various groupings of the arguments and the respondents. For example, when we classify the arguments by their partisanship, we find that the reinforcing influence is stronger than the converting for both Republican and Democratic arguments, though in differing degrees.

But when we prepare our indices for Republicans and Democrats separately, we find that their relative strength is different for the two kinds of voters and for reasons which we can hypothesize if not positively identify. The converting influence (recognition-upon-agreement) is stronger for Republicans, and the reinforcing influence (agreement-upon-recognition) stronger for Democrats. The Republicans tended more to believe because they saw, and the Democrats to see because they believed.

What is the explanation? Why were Republicans converted more often than reinforced, and why were Democrats reinforced more often than converted? One answer is the content emphasis of the mediums of communication. We know that the content was strongly Republican; this was true not only for our selected arguments but also for the whole campaign effort. This bias presumably disposed the two party groups to use communications differently. The Republican voter were exposed to a generally friendly communication environment, whereas the Democrats were obliged to seek out statements favorable to their position. The Republicans may thus have been somewhat more susceptible to influence from the content because of their greater reliance upon and confidence in it. On the other hand, the Democrats found the content so unfavorable to their own position that they tended to use it as a source of confirmation of existing opinions—when they could find them stated—rather than as a source of new information. In short, the

heavy Republican bias of the communication content led the Republicans to rely upon it as a source of campaign knowledge and led the Democrats to use it as a source of self-support, whenever they could find it. Relatively, the content convinced the Republicans and strengthened the Democrats.

This tentative hypothesis is not the only explanation. One might also attribute the differences to the nature of the people involved. This explanation would maintain that, since the Republicans were generally of a higher social status (income, education, etc.), they would be more "rational" in political affairs. The Democrats, on the other hand, would maintain a more stubborn, "unreasoning" position, regardless of criticism. This explanation is plausible. Against it, however, we must cite other evidence which shows that Republicans were as strongly biased for their side as Democrats were for theirs.

Another explanation would hold the nature of the arguments responsible, since we were compelled to use different combinations of arguments for Republicans and Democrats. Unfortunately, the data do not allow us to investigate this factor fully. However, for one argument we do have data for both kinds of influence (reinforcing and converting) and for both sets of voters. That argument is: "Willkie is a corporation lawyer whose real sympathies are all with big business"; and although it is an isolated item, we may note it for whatever it is worth. The argument is Democratic and hence tends to work against our original hypothesis, since it would seem more likely to convince Democrats than Republicans. The indices, however, clearly conform to the total Republican-Democratic pattern. Republicans tended to agree because they had seen or heard the argument; and Democrats tended to see or hear the argument because they already agreed with it.

This concludes the report on our investigation into the actual processes whereby mass communication affects public

opinion. There has been much discussion in recent years of the influence of newspapers upon American political life. The presidential campaigns of 1936 and 1940 have raised the question; the majority of the press supported one candidate, but the majority of the people supported the other. Does this mean that the newspaper has no influence? Of course it does not. Influence does not mean correspondence; newspapers can influence public opinion without determining it completely. Newspapers, and other mediums of mass communication influence public opinion, but so do other factors.

It has been our purpose here to identify such factors in terms of two main questions: Why do people come across arguments and why do they accept them? Briefly, our answers are these. Mainly, people come across the arguments which the mediums of communication emphasize; they also tend to see the arguments they want to see and other arguments whose statement is appealing. Mainly (within a given time), people accept the arguments which support their own general position; they also tend to accept the arguments which they see in the public communications and those whose statement is persuasive.

This is one picture of the effects of print upon public opinion. Print is effective in shaping public opinion. Print does reinforce its readers. And, for whatever reasons, print does convert its readers.

If print is effective, it is important that its effects serve the public interest within the democratic framework. The public interest is best served when the people have a clear comprehension of the relevant alternatives in public policy. "Within the democratic framework" means that the people themselves influence important public decisions. In order to clarify public opinion through print, what is to be done? During recent years various proposals for improving the administration of mass communications have been made. I should like to add one more suggestion, which, though defi

nately limited in scope, may help to realize the public interest within the democratic framework.

My suggestion envisages a sort of Gallup poll of mass communications, conducted by an impartial scientific agency for communication research. By the use of content analysis the agency would keep a systematic check of the stimuli presented through mass communications on controversial issues. It would present to the public a clear statement of the arguments advanced by opposing sides in public debate, even with their relative frequencies. It would dissect the argumentation of the participants and identify the arguments on which each side placed most reliance. It would learn which arguments were answered by the opposition and which were not; and, if answered, how. Furthermore, it would analyze such propaganda for other categories such as the use of emotionalized terms; the public could then be told the extent to which each side of the controversy depended upon such non-rational devices. Other categories for analysis could be suggested, to the end of clarifying for the public the positions of the protagonists. Methods—voluntary or compulsory—of bringing the results of the analysis to wide public attention could probably be worked out. So could methods of making the presentation appealing to a wide public. The public would have a clear, concise, complete, picture of the state of the argument through time. And such a content analysis of mass communications would not only be useful for public consumption; the expert could use it to study relationships between communications and public opinion in the large.

This is not all. One primary deficiency of mass communication in our democracy is the disparity between what is communicated by the best and what is communicated to the most. By the best I mean the scholars, "the specialists on truth." We have been told—and it is probably true—that in this age of specialization democracy must learn to rely upon its experts for the administration and solution of public problems. Here is another way in which expert knowledge can

serve public interest. Our agency could analyze scholarship related to public issues and report to the public, which could then compare expert knowledge and judgment with the arguments of the protagonists to the controversy. Of course, the scholars may not always be right, but they are probably wrong less frequently than any other group. Here we put what is known by the best at the service of the opinion of the most; we bridge the gap between them.

In totalitarian countries the *élite* communicates in frankness and truth only to the *élite*; to the masses it communicates in terms of desired response. The distinction of democracy is that the knowing *élite* should communicate in frankness and truth to the masses. Democracy may depend upon our achieving intercommunication, and comprehension, between *élite* and mass. The many must benefit by the knowledge accumulated by the few. I will not be thought disrespectful if I say, in all humility, that never have so many had so much to gain from so few.

